

**Liar, Liar**  
The Ninth Commandment  
Exodus 20:1-17

Perhaps you've seen them in your travels while on vacation. Or maybe someone sent them to you in an email. Those billboards years ago that first appeared in Florida; ads referencing the Ten Commandments positioned right next to or alongside ads for the state lottery.

In bold, large print they read: "WHAT PART OF THOU SHALT NOT . . . DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND" and it was signed "GOD." Another one had this warning, "KEEP USING MY NAME IN VAIN AND I WILL MAKE THE RUSH HOUR EVEN LONGER, - GOD."

Today we focus on the ninth commandment which says: "You shall not give false witness." As I've watched what has been taking place in Albany NY these past few weeks with Governor Cuomo and others involved in that debacle, I keep wondering, "What part of this commandment don't they understand?"

An old man on his death bed was obviously troubled. When asked what was disturbing him, he replied, "One day when I was young I was playing with some other boys at a crossroad. We reversed a sign post so that its arms were pointing in the wrong direction, and I've never ceased to wonder how many people were sent in the wrong direction by what we did."

This is the problem with a false witness or testimony, lying, gossiping, or tattling. **A false witness can kill a person as quickly and be as deadly as a bullet or poison dart.** A false witness always provides the wrong direction for human life. A false witness always prevents a sense of community from developing.

The ninth commandment was not written to be used in a courtroom to ensure the truth be told to a judge. It was and is intended for our everyday work, and witness, and walk with God.

One of the things that struck me about the whole episode in New York's capital is the difficulty some are having in even coming to grips with what exactly is the truth and what is right and wrong.

"I'm an affectionate guy." "I hug a lot of people." There are no such difficulties when we read the Ten Commandments. What part of "Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness" don't people understand?

The story is told of a young boy walking on the beach who comes upon an older man preparing to catch crabs. The boy had never seen anyone catch crabs, so he sat on a bench nearby and watched. The old crabber worked his strings and nets and pretty soon began to catch lots of crabs. He threw them into a big bucket.

Before long the boy noticed crab legs inching over the top of the bucket. "Mister," the boy said to the old crabber, "you better put a lid on your bucket or all of your crabs are going to get away!" "Not a chance," he replied. "Whenever one of them gets to the top, the other crabs just it back down."

That sounds all too familiar. That's **the problem with false witness and slander - it only pulls people down** - it never lifts them up. False witness and slander serves no "GODLY PURPOSE." I like the positive affirmation of this ninth commandment written by Dr. Elton Trueblood: "Report with truth your neighbor's deed."

Many of you have seen the comedy movie *Liar, Liar* starring Jim Carrey. It's about a young divorced father, a lawyer, who has a hard time telling the truth which leads to broken promises and a very disappointed son. The lying gets so bad that he lies to his son about why he didn't show up for his son's birthday party, which he promised to attend.

His son – just before he blows out the candles on his birthday cake – makes a wish that his father would not be able to lie and would tell the truth for a 24-hour period.

The wish comes true resulting in a movie that is as comical as it is tragic about truth-telling in our modern society where outright lies are commonplace, and white lies are justified as being kind to the other even if untruthful.

For many, lying has become a way of life and telling the truth will require a major reorientation and transformation of character.

Years ago Dostoevsky wrote in *The Brothers Karamazov*:

"The important thing is to stop lying to yourself. A man who lies to himself and believes his own lies becomes unable to recognize the truth, either in himself or in anyone else, and he ends up losing respect for himself as well as for others. When he has no respect for anyone, he can no longer love, and in order to divert himself, having no love in him, he yields to his impulses, indulges in the lowest forms of pleasure, and behaves in the end like an animal, in satisfying his vices. And it all comes from lying, lying to others and to yourself."

You'll remember, the nation of Israel had just been delivered from the harsh life they had experienced in Egypt. It all started when a Pharaoh came to power who did not know Joseph. All sorts of false things were told about the Jews, who became a scapegoat for all the problems in Egypt.

The Jews were stripped of their dignity and eventually enslaved. The people whom Moses delivered were hardly saints or Sunday school students having been influenced by the degrading system of slavery. God had to be sure they would not pull each other down, but rather build each other up into a caring, compassionate people.

To build a different kind of nation required a different kind of people based on a new unique building code. A building code where everyone was a son or daughter of Abraham. Where everyone was a child of the covenant. Even the sojourner in the land - like they had once been - was to be cared for in a gentle way.

A thought-provoking ad appeared occasionally in the *Wall Street Journal* in the late 70's early 80's by Harry Gray, then CEO of United Technologies. It was called, "The Snake That Poisons Everyone". The ad said that this snake topples governments, wrecks marriages, ruins careers, destroys reputations, causes heartaches, nightmares, indigestion, spawns suspicion, generates grief, dispatches innocent people to cry on their pillows. Even its name hisses. It's called gossip. Office gossip. Shop gossip. Party gossip. It makes headlines and headaches. Before you repeat a story, ask yourself: Is it true? Is it fair? Is it necessary? If not, shut up.

If you turn to Proverbs 6:16-20 you'll read that there are seven things that are detestable to God. And the astute reader will notice that four of them deal with the improper use of the tongue and lying. What part of "Thou Shalt Not . . ." don't we understand?

Of course, we know that lying comes from Satan, the Father of Lies (John 8:44). We know that the first lie that came from Satan was directed toward Adam and Eve. And we

know that lying has been an ongoing historical reality and phenomenon in every generation since that first lie was uttered in the Garden of Eden.

In the epistle of James we learn that the tongue, while a small part of our body, has enormous power and influence. So the 9th commandment is constantly reinforced in other parts of God's word.

**We are to do more than not lie--we are to be a people of the truth.** And when we speak the truth, we're to do so in love. Our Lord Jesus was "full of grace and truth." Revelations 20:1-3 tells us that the great hope for the world is when Jesus binds Satan so that he will deceive the nations no more.

Unlike crabs, we who call ourselves Christian are not to pull each other down but lift each other up. We, who call ourselves Christian, are to live out God's law in love – and “weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.”

Christ invites us to share all our faults, sins, and failures with him because he is not only filled with Truth, but Grace as well. And the more truthful we are with him the greater his grace will be shared with us.

Instead of pointing out the logs or specks in your eye, he will wipe them away. All he asks is that you love others as he has loved you. As freely as you have received, freely you should give. Now, that is something to bear witness about! Amen.